

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** August 10, 2017

**Agenda Item:** HD 311 Late Shoulder Season North of Highway 84 (Bozeman to Norris Road)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Min

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**Background:** Elk season structure changes are normally proposed in December with final action in February during odd-numbered years. However, occasionally FWP comes before the Commission when exceptional circumstances warrant a proposal outside this cycle. The herein proposed shoulder season in HD 311 is one such exceptional circumstance.

FWP proposes to institute a shoulder season beginning this fall, running from the end of general firearms season to Feb. 15, 2018 in the north half of HD 311 – that portion north of Highway 84. The objective is to reduce game damage and reduce brucellosis risk by changing elk distribution through prescribed hunting pressure. This proposal responds to a marked and sudden change in the distribution of over 1,800 elk that has been difficult to manage using traditional options like game damage and management hunts, hazing and herders among a patchwork of numerous landowners. Although elk are not over objective in HD 311 the shoulder season guidelines allow for a shoulder season under these circumstances. This area is also within the brucellosis Designated Surveillance Area, and the elk herd of most concern here, the one at the north end of the Spanish Peaks, has a seroprevalance of 22.5%. Ranchers are very concerned about these elk mixing with their cattle. Detailed information on this proposal was in the June Commission packet.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** While developing this proposal over 100 people including landowners, landowner/watershed groups, outfitters, local sportsmen, two sportsmen's groups, FWP game wardens, the local FWP Commissioner, and people from other agencies (USFS, BLM, NRCS, etc) were vetted. During the June 7 to July 16 comment period we received 19 comments. Concerns include that a shoulder season on private lands could lead to fewer elk on the National Forest the next fall, any hunting of elk during a late season, that wolves were moving elk to private land, and that landowners did not open their land during general season. Positive comments are that a shoulder season may work better than the game damage hunts, will increase hunter opportunity, and landowners appreciate using hunters to manage elk herds causing damage. Landowners are nearly unanimous in favor of this change because it will help them alleviate game damage and brucellosis concerns. Comments received during the comment period are included in the Commission packet.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or not considered and thereby maintain the status quo.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the Commission adopt the late shoulder season in the north half of hunting district 311 beginning in 2017.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission adopt a late shoulder season in the north half of hunting district 311, north of Highway 84, beginning in 2017.